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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of industrial/organizational psychologists are becoming involved with the preparation of training seminars for Chinese managers. When developing training programs for Chinese audiences, educational planners need to consider the following factors: differences in the way organizations are structured in the United States and in China, with corresponding differences in the roles, responsibilities, and experience levels of managers; characteristics peculiar to Chinese management trainees; and differing expectations about the content and style of presentation. The following are a few of the recommendations for program developers to bear in mind when preparing material for Chinese audiences: obtain estimated needs statements and participant background summaries from sponsoring agencies; prepare detailed course materials for prior translation and review all translations carefully; remember that Chinese persons value age, dignity, and formality of presentation; maintain a respect for Chinese needs and remain sensitive to contextual communication; strive for a clear and logical stepwise progression of content; use quantitative exercises and repeat points in a variety of ways; and select examples appropriate for Chinese experience. (MN)

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# ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR CHINESE MANAGERS

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Issues in the Development of Training

Programs for Chinese Managers

The People's Republic of China has recently undertaken a major effort to modernize its industry. Because of this effort, an increasing number of industrial/organizational psychologists are becoming involved with the preparation of training seminars for Chinese managers. Unfortunately, many of these training programs encounter problems and frustrations that seriously reduce their effectiveness because they attempt to transfer directly to China training programs developed for U.S. or for western management purposes rather than developing a specific program designed for a Chinese audience. The present paper describes some of the issues encountered in a series of exchanges and management training seminars for Chinese managers conducted in the U.S. and in China.

Identification of training needs and the development of a management training program appropriate for Chinese audiences is complicated by a number of factors. Among these factors are: (a) differences in the way organizations are structured with corresponding differences in the roles, and the responsibility and experience levels of managers, (b) characteristics of the management trainees, and (c) differing expectations about the content and style of presentation.

Structure of Chinese organization. Organizations in China are undergoing major structural changes in the attempt to streamline management practices and improve productivity and efficiency. Traditionally, organizations in China have operated within a highly centralized and very complicated decision structure, where production quotas were set and many other decisions made by centralized government agencies external to the



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organization. Resources, manpower, and output decisions were largely outside the control of the local production manager. The emphasis of production was to build a self-contained domestic economy based on heavy industry. Most plants contained two types of manager--an ideological manager whose authority derived from dedication to the practices and ideology of the communist party and a technocratic manager whose authority derived from specific technological training often in engineering related fields. Under this structure, the ideological manager was responsible for personnel related management, while the technocratic manager controlled production and technological issues.

Prior to 1976, authority was generally greater for the ideological manager. Seniority and experience played a major role for both types. Managerial style was largely bureaucratic and somewhat feudalistic where full employment was emphasized over the quality of an individual's work effort. Because of such influences there has been relatively little knowledge of or interest in the behavioral management techniques which receive so much attention in western organizations.

This structure is currently changing but neither overwhelmingly nor at a uniform rate. Especially in the organizations targeted for modernization, the ideological managers are being gradually replaced by production managers whose training is technical rather than political or ideological. An emphasis is present on promoting the relatively younger, better educated and technically sophisticated managers to head China's major industries. These managers bring an interesting blend of pragmatism and technical know-how to their jobs, but generally possess little experience with the types of administration and personnel management procedures

involved in similar positions in western companies. Thus, the decision-making and behavioral management skills of these managers are likely to be at very different levels of development from those of their western counterparts.

China is currently streamlining procedures by dismantling many of the government administrative agencies that previously existed to make management decisions. In the absence of such agencies, the Chinese manager is faced with an extensive trial-and-error process to develop efficient procedures. Thus, management training programs for such individuals must accommodate a somewhat unusual blend of sophistication and inexperience not often encountered in western managers.

Characteristics of Chinese management trainees. The Chinese participants in management seminars are often individuals who enjoy high status in their own society both as a function of their organizational role and as a function of educational attainment. Because of the pilot nature of the effort toward modernization, graduates from the country's top universities and technical institutes are often selected for participation in the training seminars. Further, many of these people are expected to teach others about what they have learned. Motivation is often quite high, but expectations about course content are often vague. Similarly, previous training and experience is likely to be highly focused in a single technical area. The educational background is often engineering or technical and also highly focused in content. Finally, many of the managers may be older than the personnel providing the training. In a culture that often equates age with wisdom and expertise, this difference places a greater burden on the instructor to establish the necessary base of knowledge and authority.

Presentation of material. While language differences represent an obvious source of difficulty in cross-cultural management training, simple translation concerns often mask a variety of other issues. One of these is the lack of a common base of concepts and applications upon which to build a course. Some management concepts are deeply rooted in a western management tradition and may be completely unfamiliar to the Chinese manager. No corresponding term may exist to translate these concepts to the Chinese language. In other cases, terms may translate but convey very different meaning. For example, "secretary" conveys a high political office holder to the Chinese listener. The western practice of substituting proprietary brand names for generic products is also confusing to the Chinese. The interpreters themselves are often from engineering or science backgrounds and may be unfamiliar with many management or psychological concepts. Similarly, the pace and flow of a verbal presentation presented via an interpreter takes on an unfamiliar character. Much less material can be covered in a given time. Further, multiple repetitions of key points are required to ensure comprehension.

Western presentations to management audiences are often characterized by an easy informality and a humorous delivery style. Emphasis is placed on "bottom line" issues and recommendations. Participant questions and workshops are used to ensure involvement and applicability to the participants. General issues are highlighted but case studies and specific examples are used to develop understanding. Participant inputs are frequently used to fine-tune the content and ensure its applicability to the particular group.

Chinese participants are often unfamiliar with such techniques. Both

their cultural and engineering backgrounds stress a full, logical development of the rationale and background of an issue before the bottom-line is discussed. Qualitative and experience-based decision models are often unfamiliar and may be discarded in a search for quantitative models. Formality of presentation may be preferred.

Audience participation may also take a different form. Question and answer exchanges are often more formal where questions are submitted during breaks or submitted to elected class officials. Participants may be unwilling to suggest applicable course content or provide corrective feedback even when solicited because such inputs would be embarrassing to the instructor. Thus, the organizers of such a training program will be forced to take additional efforts to ensure applicability to an audience with widely varied sets of experiences and widely varied needs.

The foregoing discussion has identified a number of areas of potential concern for an individual seeking to develop a management training program for Chinese managers. These concerns are summarized in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 and 2 about here

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## Recommendations

In order to address these concerns listed above, a number of steps appear helpful. These steps are summarized in Table 2 and cover three major areas: a) Preliminary preparation, b) Instructor training, and c) Presentation of materials.

Preliminary work. Initial interactions and general discussions about the nature of the training program are usually conducted under the auspices

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of a central Chinese agency that sponsors the program and is responsible for selecting participants. Direct contact with participants prior to the session is unlikely. Similarly, specific information about the objectives of training may be difficult to articulate without a better idea of the background and positions of the participants. Thus, preliminary development should seek as complete a list of participants and details about their background as is possible. Similarly, it is important to seek as detailed an outline as possible of the content coverage expected by the sponsoring agency and the uses to which the content will be put. Finally, while the selection of course content will rest primarily on the persons offering the training program, such content should be reviewed and negotiated with the sponsoring agency in advance to ensure applicability to the needs of the audience.

Instructors. Because of Chinese cultural traditions, age, dignity and formality are often viewed as requisites of expertise. Serious, scholarly presentations and evidence of extensive preparation are valued. Similarly, formal presentations are viewed as more appropriate to the management audience. However, the Chinese are sensitive to their cultural legacy and tend to reject authoritarian pronouncements about the way things should be done. Instructors should be attuned to the Chinese desire to hear what is being done elsewhere but to select their own course of action. In this regard, instructors must be as willing to learn as to teach. Similarly, instructors must evidence a sensitivity to the Chinese orientation to the format in which things are done.

Further, it is necessary for the instructors to have a genuine appreciation for the needs of the Chinese and a respect for their culture. This appreciation often translates to a broad tolerance for practices and an ideology that differ substantially from those familiar to most westerners.

The Chinese rely heavily on contextual cues in communication where the message changes meaning depending upon the manner of presentation and the accompanying context.

Finally, instructors must be taught how to work with an interpreter. It is necessary to establish in advance the meaning and interpretation of many concepts and terms. This may mean the review of relevant material or a complete text of the presentation for advance interpretation.

Presentation. As noted earlier, it is often desirable to present the material using a clear, logical and stepwise progression where each point is clearly tied to the central theme. It is also necessary for the instructor to select examples and case studies that are consistent with Chinese experience and needs. At present, Chinese organizations are more similar in many ways to management concerns faced by the U.S. Department of Defense rather than those faced by private agencies. Similarly, specific Chinese applications may be used but it is often best to make the implications of such case studies implicit rather than explicit. In other words, it is usually better to indicate what is being done in western companies, leaving the Chinese to draw their own conclusions about what is appropriate to China than it is to attempt to make concrete recommendations.

A final point concerns the participation of managers in the evolution of training. In keeping with Chinese practices, the class usually elects a class president and officers. These officers conduct a formal review, critique and study sessions after each day of training. Participant inputs may be obtained by private discussions with the class officers. This latter format will reveal concerns comments and reactions that could not be identified in more public discussions.

In conclusion, it is difficult to develop training programs that will meet the needs of Chinese managers. Different techniques must be developed and different skills honed. However, the growing emphasis on learning about western management skills and techniques promise a growing potential for research and practice for the industrial/organizational psychologists.

Table 1
Potential Concerns in Training Chinese Managers

Structural

- Change from high centralization at national government level to limited decentralization.
- Consolidation of personnel and production management functions.
- Changed from production quota/fixed input system to production efficiency system.
- Movement from heavy industry emphasis.
- Little previous emphasis on behavioral management or individual performance.
- Dismantling of national administrative agencies and delegation of responsibility to local managers.
- Bureaucratic and feudalistic structure.

Training Participants

- High level or slated for high level positions.
- Engineering or technical training of narrow focus.
- Pragmatic orientation.
- Inexperienced in qualitative decision making.
- Inexperienced in administrative and personnel management techniques.

Content Presentation

- Use of an interpreter.
- Lack of corresponding terms and concepts.
- Emphasis on logical flow and presentation of background data.
- Differences in participative techniques.
- Emphasis on formal presentation.

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Table 2
Recommendations for Training Program for Chinese Managers

Preliminary

- Obtain estimated needs statement and participant background summaries from sponsoring agency
- Develop detailed content proposal for discussion and negotiation with agency
- Review material for application to audience
- Prepare detailed course materials for prior translation
- Review translation

Instructors

- Age, dignity and formality of presentation valued
- Extensive preparation valued
- Willing to learn as well as teach
- Respect for Chinese needs
- Sensitivity to need for appropriate form
- Sensitivity to contextual communication
- Tolerance of different practice and ideology
- Trained to work with an interpreter

Presentation

- Explicit theoretical rationale
- Clear, logical stepwise progression of content
- Quantitative exercises valued
- Multiple repetition of points using different phrasing and examples
- Selection of examples appropriate to Chinese experience (e.g., U.S. Federal Government)
- Indicate what is done elsewhere not what should be done in China
- Conferences with elected training class officer